



Education and Broadband Advisory Committee

Tuesday, June 11, 2013

10:00 a.m.

House Room C, General Assembly Building

The first meeting of the Education and Broadband Advisory Committee of the Joint Commission on Technology and Science was held on June 11, 2013. Advisory Committee members, Delegates Kathy Byron (chairman), Kaye Kory, and Scott Surovell were present, as well as citizen members from state agencies, local governments, and the private sector were present and actively participated in the Committee discussions.

After Delegate Byron called the meeting to order and introductions were made, the Advisory Committee received a brief overview of HB 1777, HB 1915, and HB 2286. All three bills were referred to JCOTS by the House Science and Technology Committee during the 2013 session.

Delegate Kory, chief patron of HB 2286, noted that the goal of the bill was to ensure that local school boards had a clear understanding of the access students have, both at school and at home, to online content. This understanding would help inform the local school board when deciding to adopt electronic textbooks with online content.

Delegate Kory and staff explained that the bill requires the Board of Education, in conjunction with the Center for Innovative Technology, to annual report to the General Assembly and the Governor, the level of broadband connectivity of each local school division and the level of computer ownership and access to broadband of students. The bill also requires that the data in the report is available on the Commonwealth Broadband Accessibility Map. In addition, the bill specifies that electronic textbooks will be available to students free of charge and expands the requirement that contracts and purchase orders for textbooks allow for the purchase of print, print and electronic textbooks, or just electronic textbooks to all grades.

Delegate Surovell, chief patron of HB 1915, explained that the goal of his bill was to ensure that all students that are assigned an electronic textbook have both a device and internet access that are required to utilize the electronic textbook. The bill prohibits local school boards from using electronic textbooks unless the local school board has taken steps to ensure that each student in the local school division has actual access to at least one compatible personal computing device that is not shared with another student and has

internet access at a level of 256kb per second. Local school boards may establish pilot programs for electronic textbooks at individual schools if such school is either a Title I school, or less than 5% of the school participates in the pilot program and all students in the school have actual access to at least one compatible personal computing device that is not shared with another student, each student has internet access at a level of 256kb per second.

Delegate Filler-Corn, chief patron of HB 1777, sent a letter to the Committee explaining the goal of her bill. HB 1777 intends to curb the increasing costs of textbooks by providing free e-textbooks for many of the most enrolled in classes. The bill establishes the Virginia Open Education Resources Council and the Virginia Digital Open Source Textbook Library. The Council would consist of faculty members from each public university of higher education chosen by the institution's Board of Visitors, and one chosen by the State Board for Community Colleges. The Director of SCHEV would also serve as an ex officio member. The bill requires the Council to develop a list of 50 undergraduate courses, to create and administer a review process for open source textbooks, acquire open source textbooks to be used in the list of 50 courses, and to develop the Virginia Open Source Textbook Library to archive the digital textbooks. The textbooks will be available at no costs to the students and the bill does not require that faculty members use the textbooks.

Following the overviews of the three referred bills, the Committee received three presentations. Martin Krievs, of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, gave an overview of the types of electronic textbooks available for elementary and secondary schools. Mr. Krievs explained that there are a variety of types of electronic textbooks including eTextbooks, iBooks textbooks, Kno eTextbooks, mobile device dedicated apps, and online editions. The electronic textbook marketplace has no real industry standards and so the publishers have tried to develop content in a variety of formats in order to ensure compatibility with the various devices or platforms. The Committee inquired into other devices or platforms for electronic textbooks such as smart televisions. The Committee noted that the online editions of textbooks require internet access which may not be available for all students, and also inquired into the possibility of open source textbooks and the best formats for open source. Mr. Krievs responded that publishers were committed to providing content and were not married to any one format or type of electronic textbook.

Dr. Tammy McGraw, Director of Educational Technology, Virginia Department of Education, gave a presentation on the Department's efforts to support the transition to digital learning. Through its Beyond Textbooks program, the Department has established several pilot programs in the Commonwealth. The main takeaways from the pilot programs are that the infrastructure needed to support an electronic textbook program is often bigger than anticipated and that professional development for teachers is critical to a program's success. In addition to the pilot programs, the Department's e-Learning Backpack initiative provides funding for schools that are not fully accredited to purchase tablet computers and content for 9th grade students. The Committee inquired student access to devices and the internet. Dr. McGraw noted that students and their families are not always truthful when disclosing home access and that even for students with access

the technology itself may become a barrier if the student or his family is not tech savvy. The Committee also inquired into what other states are doing. Dr. McGraw noted that while she attends the State Educational Technology Conference, the decision to implement electronic textbooks is a local one, and solutions need to be tailored to the locality. The Department supports local school boards by providing matching funds including funds for professional development.

Karen Jackson, Deputy Secretary of Technology, gave an overview of broadband access in the Commonwealth. She noted that some areas in the state have neither wired access nor cellular access to the internet. This is due to both lack of supply and a lack of demand. The Broadband Accessibility Map reflects the state's understanding of broadband access but information about students and schools is not available. In the past schools were required to report information on their connectivity and speed. Ms. Jackson noted that the technological problems are solvable but the solutions can be resource intensive. The Committee was concerned with getting the data about both school access and individual student's access. The Deputy Secretary explained that obtaining data about individual student's access would prove challenging. The Committee also noted that the technology is there to provide access for every student, however, the resources may not be.

Following the presentations and discussion, Delegate Byron stated that she would write a letter on behalf of the Committee asking school systems for information concerning their broadband connectivity and speed. Chairman Byron also asked the Committee members for suggestions for the next meeting which is tentatively scheduled for September. The meeting was adjourned.